

THE CASE OF THE ACRO-DOUBLE

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Thursday, Late Morning

It was 11:00 A.M. when Farley West returned to his apartment. A leisurely breakfast followed by a short walk through the park had eased the feeling of melancholy caused by the recent death of Guy Orient.

As he closed the door behind him, the telephone rang. He walked to the hall table and picked up the receiver. "Mr. West. This is Police Lieutenant Jamison. I saw you at the funeral yesterday." A picture of a stocky, middle-aged man with black hair streaked with gray crossed his memory. Not too many others had attended. A brother who had made the sudden funeral arrangements, the priest, several business associates and several women.

"I was wondering when you wanted to see me."

"This is my first chance. There were other things that had to be done. I'll be over in a few minutes."

West replaced the receiver. On the table still remained an obituary page from the Bulletin with the following headline encircled in red: GUY ORIENT, POET, SHOT TO DEATH. Also on the table was the poet's only book of published poems.

West carried the book into his small sitting room and sat down on the couch. Idly riffling through the pages of Acrostically Speaking, his attention focused on one poem that the poet might have written as his own epitaph. Slowly, West read:

Queried I: Noble Lord, why am I here?
Unseen, I go, friendless, lost and alone,
Each hour, as empty as those which have flown;
Still my ancient fears, grant me peace of mind . . .
Think not, sad fool, that My travail is kind;
If doubt awakens fears and dark despair,
Obey your empty lusts which leave you bare;
Naked you rose, so shall you disappear . . .

The doorbell rang. West placed the book on a table and went to the door and opened it. Lieutenant Jamison stood there, his round face, shadowed by black stubble, contrasted with West's close-shaven angularity. After introductions, West, a head taller than the stocky policeman, led him into the small sitting room.

Jamison walked over to the window, looked down at the green expanse of the park. "My main purpose for coming here is to find out more about Orient. To begin with, was Guy Orient his real name?"

"No. His name was Julius Wojehowiecz. But it was thought better to give him a pen name. After the book was published, he changed his name."

"How well did you know him?"

"Not too well. He was an investment counselor at Kevin, Wilder and Hatch. He placed a number of orders for me. One day he showed me a poem he had constructed. It was something new. He called it an Anachuttle, a combination anagram, acrostic and shuttle rhyme. I found it rather ingenious. Later he visited my apartment and showed me more of his acrostics. I saw some possibilities and with Guy's permission showed them to a friend of mine at Sapphire Press. Though the market for poetry is highly nebulous, they decided to take a chance because of the novelty."

Jamison sat down in an armchair across from West. "Poetry is not in my line. What is the novelty?"

West handed him the book Acrostically Speaking. "If you will notice each initial vertical letter of each poem spells out a word or a phrase. In addition, several acrostics have alliterative lines or the same unusual terminal rhyme. Guy was very inventive, and in addition to the initial acrostics, sometimes there are other vertical acrostics. For example, study this poem I call his epitaph. If you will look closely, you will see there is no answer to the question."

Jamison read the poem slowly, then his blue eyes leveled at West. "Very clever. I see what you mean."

"The book also contains several Anachuttles, several Acro-Crosswords, even a couple of Acro-Doubles and an Acro-Triple."

"Did you say Acro-Double?"

"Yes, why?"

Jamison reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper which he handed to West. "I found this in his typewriter. He must have completed it just before he was shot. The killer must not have thought it important enough to remove."

West read:

Pity not the reaping of my trouble, stubble
Ever remains of my folly, yet my vain heart
Recks not melancholy. Cuckolds, dare I impart,
Rapture is dust. Hate not our immoderate brash
Young lust . . . If one of three fools cannot bear the clash

Anger inflames, then autist's world must crash. Though death
Lies within your grim righteous power, regard my breath.
Lost in this final hour importunes a higher fate . . .
Escape today, surely tomorrow you may rate
No way to stem vengeance of this Acro-Double.

West studied the poem for a while after he read it. Then his brown eyes probed Jamison. "I suspect Perry Allen was one of the three fools. Did you find out who the other two were?"

Jamison thought for a moment then decided to answer the question. "Yes. One was Dr. Thomas Murchison and the other was Percival Blye, the artist. Their wives, like the wife of Perry Allen, had been customers of Orient. It appears, in addition to his hobby as a poet, he also had a hobby of cultivating other men's wives. Didn't you know about this aspect of his life?"

"No. Guy was rather close-mouthed about things other than his acrostics." West shook his head. "In fact it is hard to visualize a five foot five man, semi-bald, and wearing glasses, like Guy, being a lover."

West remained silent for a moment, then said: "I suspect since you have called on me that you have not been able to arrest any one of the three men. What about Perry Allen? From the acrostic, I would gather he is the most logical one."

Jamison replied, "Several people in the apartment building heard the shot. When they broke into his apartment, Orient already was dead. The killer had disappeared, presumably by a rear door. The time was 1:25 P.M. At that particular time, Perry Allen was hosting his own television show which runs daily from 1 to 2 P.M."

"Some of these shows are taped."

"We checked that angle thoroughly. The program was live."

"I've watched some of his programs. There are times when a singer or entertainer is on alone for quite a while. How about Dr. Murchison and the artist Blye?"

"Negative. Dr. Murchison had an appointment with a middle-aged woman from 1 to 2 P.M. that day. The receptionist's office appointment book verifies the time, and I checked with the woman who states she was in his office the entire hour."

"And the artist?"

"Conducting a one-man show at the Lyman Galleries."

"So you have three suspects and three alibis."

Jamison responded slowly. "Any alibi can be broken if it is a phony."

West studied the last acrostic Orient had written. "Perhaps the answer lies here. Let me analyze it a bit more. May I keep it?"

Jamison rose. He wrote his phone number on a notebook page, tore it out and handed it to West. "Call me if you get something."

Thursday Evening

"Lieutenant Jamison. West here. I think I have your man." West stated his name.

"Are you positive?"

"I checked it out with one of the Acro-Doubles. But it was the 'Sad Mad Poem' and 'Sly Glade Poet' of the Acro-Triple that provided the key."

Saturday Afternoon

West opened the door, newspaper in hand. Lieutenant Jamison stood there, a smile on his black-stubbled face. He stepped inside as West closed the door. They strolled into the dining room and sat down.

"Congratulations," West said. "According to the article here, your man confessed."

"Yes. I inferred someone saw him leave by the rear door. I must have been very convincing, because he handed me the murder gun. I want to thank you for your assistance. But tell me, what is an Acro-Double?"

"Two acrostic poems in one. The double poem fascinated Guy. That is where you take one poem and by changing the number of feet in a line, you create another poem with a different rhyme scheme. Only in the case of the Acro-Double, you form another acrostic, as well."

"Sounds rather complicated."

"Not to the devious mind of Orient. He wanted to make sure the killer didn't remove the acrostic." West handed Jamison a sheet of paper. "Here, read the second version of the Acro-Double" . . .

You have all the facts before you. Can you solve the mystery of Guy Orient's murder? The answer is given in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.